

---

## Childcare Workers

---

(0\*NET 39-9011.00)

---

### Significant Points

- About 2 out of 5 childcare workers are self-employed; most of these are family childcare providers.
- A high school diploma and little or no experience are adequate for many jobs, but training requirements vary from a high school diploma to a college degree.
- Large numbers of workers leave these jobs every year, creating good job opportunities.

### Nature of the Work

Childcare workers nurture and teach children of all ages in childcare centers, nursery schools, preschools, public schools, private households, family childcare homes, and before- and afterschool programs. These workers play an important role in a child's development by caring for the child when parents are at work or away for other reasons. Some parents enroll their children in nursery schools or childcare centers primarily to provide them with the opportunity to interact with other children. In addition to attending to children's basic needs, these workers organize activities that stimulate the children's physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth. They help children to explore their interests, develop their talents and independence, build self-esteem, and learn how to get along with others.

Private household workers who are employed on an hourly basis usually are called *babysitters*. These childcare workers bathe, dress, and feed children; supervise their play; wash their clothes; and clean their rooms. They also may put them to bed and waken them, read to them, involve them in educational games, take them for doctors' visits, and discipline them. Those who are in charge of infants, sometimes called infant nurses, also prepare bottles and change diapers.

*Nannies* generally take care of children from birth to age 10 or 12, tending to the child's early education, nutrition, health, and other needs. They also may perform the duties of a general housekeeper, including general cleaning and laundry duties.

Childcare workers spend most of their day working with children. However, they do maintain contact with parents or guardians through informal meetings or scheduled conferences to discuss each child's progress and needs. Many childcare workers keep records of each child's progress and suggest ways in which parents can stimulate their child's learning and development at home. Some preschools, childcare centers, and before- and after-school programs actively recruit parent volunteers to work with the children and participate in administrative decisions and program planning.

Most childcare workers perform a combination of basic care and teaching duties. Through many basic care activities, childcare workers provide opportunities for children to learn. For example, a worker who shows a child how to tie a shoelace teaches the child while also providing for that child's basic care needs. Childcare programs help children to learn about trust and to gain a sense of security.

Young children learn mainly through play. Recognizing the importance of play, childcare workers build their program around it. They capitalize on children's play to further language devel-

opment (storytelling and acting games), improve social skills (working together to build a neighborhood in a sandbox), and introduce scientific and mathematical concepts (balancing and counting blocks when building a bridge or mixing colors when painting). Thus, a less structured approach is used to teach preschool children, including small-group lessons, one-on-one instruction, and learning through creative activities, such as art, dance, and music.

Interaction with peers is an important part of a child's early development. Preschool children in childcare centers have an opportunity to engage in conversation and discussions, and to learn to play and work cooperatively with their classmates. Childcare workers play a vital role in preparing children to build the skills they will need in school. (Teacher assistants as well as teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary school are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Childcare workers in preschools greet young children as they arrive, help them to remove outer garments, and select an activity of interest. When caring for infants, they feed and change them. To ensure a well-balanced program, childcare workers prepare daily and long-term schedules of activities. Each day's activities balance individual and group play, and quiet and active time. Children are given some freedom to participate in activities in which they are interested.

Concern over school-age children being home alone before and after school has spurred many parents to seek alternative ways for their children to constructively spend their time. The purpose of before- and afterschool programs is to watch over school-age children during the gap between school hours and their parents' work hours. These programs also may operate during the summer and on weekends. Workers in before- and after-school programs may help students with their homework or engage them in other extracurricular activities. These activities may include field trips, learning about computers, painting, photography, and participating in sports. Some childcare workers may be responsible for taking children to school in the morning and picking them up from school in the afternoon. Before- and afterschool programs may be operated by public school systems, local community centers, or other private organizations.

Helping to keep young children healthy is an important part of the job. Childcare workers serve nutritious meals and snacks and teach good eating habits and personal hygiene. They en-



*Childcare workers help children to explore their interests and learn how to get along with others.*

sure that children have proper rest periods. They identify children who may not feel well or who show signs of emotional or developmental problems and discuss these matters with their supervisor and the child's parents. In some cases, childcare workers help parents to locate programs that will provide basic health services.

Early identification of children with special needs—such as those with behavioral, emotional, physical, or learning disabilities—is important to improve their future learning ability. Special education teachers often work with these preschool children to provide the individual attention they need. (Special education teachers are discussed elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

### **Working Conditions**

Preschool or childcare facilities include private homes, schools, religious institutions, workplaces in which employers provide care for employees' children, and private buildings. Individuals who provide care in their own homes generally are called family childcare providers.

Nannies and babysitters usually work in the pleasant and comfortable homes or apartments of their employers. Most are day workers who live in their own homes and travel to work. Some live in the home of their employer, generally with their own room and bath. They often become part of their employer's family, and may derive satisfaction from caring for them.

Watching children grow, learn, and gain new skills can be very rewarding. While working with children, childcare workers often improve the child's communication, learning, and other personal skills. The work is sometimes routine; however, new activities and challenges mark each day. Childcare can be physically and emotionally taxing, as workers constantly stand, walk, bend, stoop, and lift to attend to each child's interests and problems.

To ensure that children receive proper supervision, State or local regulations may require a certain ratio of workers to children. The ratio varies with the age of the children. Child development experts generally recommend that a single caregiver be responsible for no more than 3 or 4 infants (less than 1 year old), 5 or 6 toddlers (1 to 2 years old), or 10 preschool-age children (between 2 and 5 years old). In before- and afterschool programs, workers may be responsible for many school-age children at one time.

The work hours of childcare workers vary widely. Childcare centers usually are open year round, with long hours so that parents can drop off and pick up their children before and after work. Some centers employ full-time and part-time staff with staggered shifts to cover the entire day. Some workers are unable to take regular breaks during the day due to limited staffing. Public and many private preschool programs operate during the typical 9- or 10-month school year, employing both full-time and part-time workers. Family childcare providers have flexible hours and daily routines, but may work long or unusual hours to fit parents' work schedules. Live-in nannies usually work longer hours than do those who have their own homes. However, if they work evenings or weekends, they may get other time off.

Replacement needs in this occupation are high. Many childcare workers leave the occupation temporarily to fulfill family responsibilities, to study, or for other reasons. Some workers leave permanently because they are interested in pursuing other occupations or because of dissatisfaction with hours, low pay and benefits, and stressful conditions.

### **Employment**

Childcare workers held about 1.2 million jobs in 2002. Many worked part time. About 2 out of 5 childcare workers were self-employed; most of these were family childcare providers.

Sixteen percent of all childcare workers are found in child daycare services, and about 14 percent work for private households. The remainder worked primarily in local government educational services, nursing and residential care facilities, religious organizations, other amusement and recreation industries, private educational services, civic and social organizations, individual and family services, and local government, excluding education and hospitals. Some childcare programs are for-profit centers; some of these are affiliated with a local or national chain. Religious institutions, community agencies, school systems, and State and local governments operate nonprofit programs. Only a very small percentage of private industry establishments operate onsite childcare centers for the children of their employees.

### **Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

The training and qualifications required of childcare workers vary widely. Each State has its own licensing requirements that regulate caregiver training; these range from a high school diploma, to community college courses, to a college degree in child development or early-childhood education. Many States require continuing education for workers in this field. However, State requirements often are minimal. Childcare workers generally can obtain employment with a high school diploma and little or no experience. Local governments, private firms, and publicly funded programs may have more demanding training and education requirements.

Some employers prefer to hire childcare workers with a nationally recognized childcare development credential, secondary or postsecondary courses in child development and early childhood education, or work experience in a childcare setting. Other employers require their own specialized training. An increasing number of employers require an associate degree in early childhood education. Schools for nannies teach early childhood education, nutrition, and childcare.

Childcare workers must anticipate and prevent problems, deal with disruptive children, provide fair but firm discipline, and be enthusiastic and constantly alert. They must communicate effectively with the children and their parents, as well as other teachers and childcare workers. Workers should be mature, patient, understanding, and articulate, and have energy and physical stamina. Skills in music, art, drama, and storytelling also are important. Self-employed childcare workers must have business sense and management abilities.

Opportunities for advancement are limited. However, as childcare workers gain experience, some may advance to supervisory or administrative positions in large childcare centers or preschools. Often, these positions require additional training, such as a bachelor's or master's degree. Other workers move on to work in resource and referral agencies, consulting with parents on available child services. A few workers become involved in policy or advocacy work related to childcare and early childhood education. With a bachelor's degree, workers may become preschool teachers or become certified to teach in public or private schools. Some workers set up their own childcare businesses.

## Job Outlook

High replacement needs should create good job opportunities for childcare workers. Many childcare workers must be replaced each year as they leave the occupation to take other jobs, to meet family responsibilities, or for other reasons. Qualified persons who are interested in this work should have little trouble finding and keeping a job. Opportunities for nannies should be especially good, as many workers prefer not to work in other people's homes.

Employment of childcare workers is projected to increase about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2012. The number of women of childbearing age (widely considered to be ages 15 to 44) in the labor force and the number of children under 5 years of age is expected to rise gradually over the projected 2002-12 period. Also, the proportion of youngsters enrolled full or part time in childcare and preschool programs is likely to continue to increase, spurring demand for additional childcare workers.

Changes in perceptions of preprimary education may lead to increased public and private spending on childcare. If more parents believe that some experience in center-based care and preschool is beneficial to children, enrollment will increase. Concern about the behavior of school-age children during nonschool hours should increase demand for before- and afterschool programs. In addition, the difficulty of finding suitable nannies or private household workers also may force many families to seek out alternative childcare arrangements in centers and family childcare programs. Government policy often favors increased funding of early childhood education programs, and that trend will probably continue. Government funding for before- and afterschool programs also is expected to be steady over the projection period. The growing availability of government-funded center-based care and preschool programs may induce some parents to enroll their children who otherwise would not do so. Some States also are increasing subsidization of the child daycare services industry in response to welfare reform legislation. This reform might cause some mothers to enter the workforce during the projection period as their welfare benefits are reduced or eliminated.

## Earnings

Pay depends on the educational attainment of the worker and the type of establishment. Although the pay generally is very low, more education usually means higher earnings. Median hourly earnings of wage and salary childcare workers were \$7.86 in 2002. The middle 50 percent earned between \$6.66 and \$9.65. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$5.91, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$11.46. Median hourly earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of childcare workers in 2002 were as follows:

Other residential care facilities .....	\$9.51
Elementary and secondary schools .....	9.04
Civic and social organizations .....	7.25
Child daycare services .....	7.18
Other amusement and recreation industries .....	7.09

Earnings of self-employed childcare workers vary depending on the hours worked, the number and ages of the children, and the location.

Benefits vary, but are minimal for most childcare workers. Many employers offer free or discounted childcare to employees. Some offer a full benefits package, including health insur-

ance and paid vacations, but others offer no benefits at all. Some employers offer seminars and workshops to help workers learn new skills. A few are willing to cover the cost of courses taken at community colleges or technical schools. Live-in nannies get free room and board.

## Related Occupations

Childcare work requires patience; creativity; an ability to nurture, motivate, teach, and influence children; and leadership, organizational, and administrative skills. Others who work with children and need these qualities and skills include teacher assistants; teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary; and teachers—special education.

## Sources of Additional Information

For an electronic question-and-answer service on childcare, information on becoming a childcare provider, and other resources for persons interested in childcare work, contact:

► National Child Care Information Center, 243 Church St. NW., 2nd floor, Vienna, VA 22180. Telephone (tollfree): 800-424-4310. Internet: <http://www.nccic.org>

For information on becoming a family childcare provider, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

► The Children's Foundation, 725 15th St. NW., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20005-2109. Internet: <http://www.childrensfoundation.net>

For eligibility requirements and a description of the Child Development Associate credential, contact:

► Council for Professional Recognition, 2460 16th St. NW., Washington, DC 20009-3575. Internet: <http://www.cdacouncil.org>

For eligibility requirements and a description of the Certified Childcare Professional designation, contact:

► National Childcare Association, 1016 Rosser St., Conyers, GA 30012. Internet: <http://www.nccanet.org>

For information about a career as a nanny, contact:

► International Nanny Association, 191 Clarksville Rd., Princeton Junction, NJ 08550-3111. Telephone (tollfree): 888-878-1477. Internet: <http://www.nanny.org>

State Departments of Human Services or Social Services can supply State regulations and training requirements for childcare workers.